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Viewing cable 10BEIJING383, STOMP AROUND AND CARRY A SMALL STICK: CHINA'S NEW

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10BEIJING383	2010-02-12 10:12	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beijing

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article3960209.ece>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 000383
SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2030
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [TW](#) [CHINA](#) [EUN](#)
SUBJECT: STOMP AROUND AND CARRY A SMALL STICK: CHINA'S NEW
"GLOBAL ASSERTIVENESS" RAISES HACKLES, BUT HAS MORE FORM
THAN SUBSTANCE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Goldberg.
Reasons 1.4 B and D.

11. (C) Summary: The harsh (per usual) PRC reaction to the

recent U.S. announcement of arms sales to Taiwan and President Obama's intention to meet with the Dalai Lama has focused Chinese domestic attention on a phenomenon already observed (and criticized) abroad: China's muscle-flexing, triumphalism and assertiveness in its diplomacy. Foreign diplomats note that China is making no friends with its newly pugnacious attitude, but the popular assessment of China's stance, personified by the nationalistic, jingoistic and Chinese Communist Party-affiliated newspaper Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao), is "it's about time." More thoughtful observers in China argue that this attitude has more form than substance and is designed to play to Chinese public opinion. They are disturbed by this trend and say that Vice Premier Li Keqiang's speech in Davos January 28 should be seen as evidence that China's leadership is looking to soften China's perceived sharp elbows. One senior media contact advised that foreign observers should not take Chinese rhetorical strutting too seriously, as "actions speak louder than words." End summary.

Aggressive Chinese Diplomacy: Losing Friends Worldwide

¶2. (C) Numerous third-country diplomats have complained to us that dealing with China has become more difficult in the past year. The Europeans have been the most vocal in their criticism. xxxx, EU Mission xxxx in Beijing, said EU leaders had not been happy that at the November 2009 PRC-EU Summit, Premier Wen Jiabao had stated that China "expected" the EU to lift its arms embargo before the next summit. UK Embassy PolCouns xxxx said February 4 that China's behavior at the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit in December had been "truly shocking" and that Chinese officials' attitude toward other delegations had been rude and arrogant to the point where both the UK and French Embassies had been instructed to complain formally about the treatment their leaders had received from the Chinese, specifically from Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei. Wilson noted that the MFA had not been receptive to these demarches and neither the UK nor France had received a response.

¶3. (C) Indian and Japanese ambassadors voiced similar complaints in recent meetings with the Ambassador. On January 26, Indian Ambassador S. Jaishankar said India would like to "coordinate more closely" with the United States in the face of China's "more aggressive approach to international relations." Japanese Ambassador Yuji Miyamoto said February 2 that Japanese corporations had been experiencing some of the same difficulties doing business in China as other international companies had reported. Japan had noted a degree of "hubris" in China's attitude, he said.

¶4. (C) Japanese xxxx told PolOff

February 5 that Japan was frustrated with Chinese "inflexibility" on issues relating to the East China Sea. On development of oil and gas fields, where Chinese companies have already started extraction work, China had agreed to Japanese participation. However, China was being "very stubborn" and not following through on its agreements. Even more worrying, xxxx reported, was the increased aggressiveness of Chinese "coast guard" and naval units, which had provoked "many dangerous encounters" with Japanese civilian and Self-Defense Force ships. "We have not reported all of these encounters," xxxx admitted.

¶5. (C) xxxx added that Japan had heard similar complaints from its embassies in Southeast Asia about China's behavior on South China Sea issues. He said his Indonesian and Singaporean colleagues in Beijing had referred to PRC policy in the South China Sea as "more aggressive and arrogant." The Japanese Embassy in Bangkok reported that in spring 2009 before the Pattaya ASEAN-plus-3 Summit (later rescheduled and moved to a different location) the Chinese had been "aggressive and difficult" on logistics and protocol issues, alienating the other participants. "On the surface, and in front of cameras, the Chinese are friendly. But underneath, they are putting huge pressure on Southeast Asian countries and trying to divide them," xxxx said.

16. (C) The PRC had been increasingly assertive in its interactions with Indonesia in recent years, but there had not been any recent spike in diplomatic pressure, Indonesian Embassy xxxx told PolOffs February 8. xxxx noted past PRC objections to proposed visits of the Dalai Lama and the transit of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian as well as the PRC's strong reaction to the June 2009 arrest of Chinese fishermen in Indonesia's EEZ. During the July 2009 visit of Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, PRC officials had insisted that the sailors had been fishing in "historical fishing grounds" and had reiterated extensive PRC claims in the South China Sea by declaring to the Indonesians: "We have a border." Most recently, however, xxxx said, relations had been better in the run-up to State Councilor Dai Bingguo's January 2010 visit to Indonesia.

17. (C) Norwegian Embassy xxxx told PolOff February 9 that Oslo was unhappy with the trend of its relations with China. Norway was proud of its human rights dialogue with China, but there had been no results in 2009 and China had downgraded its representation at the December 2009 round from Vice Foreign Minister to Deputy Director General. Though the Chinese had taken pains to call the downgrade "not precedent-setting," Oslo had been disappointed, and that disappointment had been compounded when the Chinese sentenced democracy activist Liu Xiaobo to 11 years in prison December 25. Liu had studied in Oslo in the 1990s and so had a "direct connection to Norway," xxxx explained.

Domestic Criticism and a Change of Course

18. (C) Not all Chinese foreign policy experts are comfortable with the new PRC approach. xxxx, xxxx at Beijing News (Xinjing Bao), told PolOff February 3 that "China's more aggressive defense of its interests abroad is new; this is a change in how China presents itself abroad." He acknowledged that this stance was popular with the Chinese public, but wondered aloud whether the policy had been "thought through completely." He worried that Chinese people would be disappointed if China's more aggressive stance backfired and caused China to lose face. He compared China's aggressive treatment of foreign concerns, such as the decision to execute British citizen Ahmed Sheikh in December despite public appeals for clemency from UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, with the public praise the Chinese government had given the Chinese navy in 2009. "When China could not take any action against U.S. "spy ships" (in the USNS Impeccable incident in March 2009) and newspapers showed Chinese fishing boats arrayed against the U.S. Navy, Chinese people had questioned where was their navy, and they were disappointed." If China were to experience diplomatic setbacks, xxxx argued, the people would again feel that the government had overstated its strength relative to other states and exposed China to humiliation. For this reason, he said, China was changing its diplomatic tune and re-focusing on Hu Jintao's "harmonious world" concept. For evidence, he pointed to Vice Premier Li Keqiang's January 28 Davos speech which he said demonstrated a consensus Chinese leadership position that China should play a more cooperative role in international institutions and emphasized China's support for the existing system.

19. (C) (NOTE: Vice Premier Li Keqiang, who is slated to take over one of China's leadership positions in 2012-13, gave a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos January 28 that stressed the importance of collaborative efforts to solve global problems, emphasized twice that "we are in the same boat" (the same metaphor the Secretary used in her public remarks in Beijing in February 2009), and reiterated that China relied on a stable international situation so that it could concentrate on its own internal development challenges. Though there were a couple of digs at the United States, such as a call for "a suitable degree of responsibility and constraint on global reserve currency issuers," the criticism was subtle compared to Chinese public statements in other

international forums, such as the EU Summit.)

¶10. (C) xxxx at the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was withering in her criticism of populist/nationalistic media that exaggerated China's strength and influence in the world. Specifically citing the Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao, Chinese edition), she told PolOff February 3 that the media was "deliberately misleading the public to sell more newspapers." She said that the Global Times and similar publications were guilty of "ultra-nationalism" and "overstating Chinese capabilities." The "powerful China" theme, she said, was dangerous and wrong. "These newspapers, and the people, need to sober up a bit and realize the reality of China's position. China and the West are not on the same level, and we are not in the same stage of development." This inequality made China's relations with the West very complicated, she said, and simplistic nationalism in the press made it very hard for China to show the necessary flexibility and creativity in its foreign affairs.

¶11. (C) In a February 9 discussion with PolOff, Beijing University xxxx defended the Global Times' more "hawkish" editorial slant as "consistent with the demands of the readers and normal for a market-driven newspaper." He agreed that China's leaders wanted to refocus on the "biding one's time and concealing one's capability" (taoguang yanghui) policy, even though it was not popular with the Chinese public. xxxx said he had heard in a February 8 Global Times internal editorial meeting (which he attended as a frequent contributor to the op-ed pages) that Vice Premier Li had not wanted to make the Davos speech because he had felt it would be seen by Chinese audiences as insufficiently muscular. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, however, had insisted that he do it because of his role as "a leading figure on the economy." (NOTE: "Biding one's time and hiding one's capabilities" (taoguang yanghui) is a phrase attributed to former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping that suggests China should go along with the global status quo while developing its society and economy.)

¶12. (C) xxxx added that the text of Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's speech at the Munich Security Conference February 5 had been "totally uninteresting" and had been designed to be indistinguishable from the Li Keqiang speech. However, he said, according to a People's Daily reporter who had been there (and who was also at the February 8 Global Times editorial meeting), Yang had been "flustered" by Taiwan arms sale-related questions during the Q-and-A session and reverted to his "strong China" message, which became the basis for Western media reports of his "blunt" remarks. "He was not supposed to say that," xxxx asserted.

Public, Global Times, Love the New China

¶13. (C) xxxx of the Global Times' English-language edition and a former reporter and editor of People's Daily, told PolOff February 9 that Chinese people were increasingly seeking to express opinions to the government on foreign affairs, and their primary outlets were online and through the media, which "reflects popular opinion." He acknowledged that the government and the Communist Party influenced what got reported in the Chinese press, but claimed the pressure was not heavy-handed. "Instead of telling us what to say, they instead guide us by saying 'more of this' or 'less of that,'" xxxx said. He drew a distinction between papers of record, such as People's Daily, which existed to promulgate the Party's position on issues, and "market-driven" media like Global Times, which "must reflect public opinion to make money." Global Times, he said, listened to its readers and therefore advocated an editorial line that "demands international respect" for China. China's foreign policy tilted toward assertiveness in 2009, xxxx acknowledged, but he cautioned that this "new trend" might not continue. "Biding our time and hiding our capabilities" was not satisfying to the Chinese public (or

the People's Liberation Army), xxxx said, but the government felt it necessary to achieve China's domestic goals.

¶14. (C) Global Times xxxx told PDOff February 9 that the paper was willing to publish different views and was actively seeking opportunities to interview U.S. government officials. xxxx felt the current strong Chinese rhetoric was in reaction to netizen anger at U.S. arms sales, but that Global Times could present both sides. The paper's Chinese- and English-language editions ran an opinion piece by the Ambassador February 11 noting the importance of U.S.-China relations and explaining how U.S. arms sales to Taiwan have maintained stability across the Strait (creating a better, stronger and more confident cross-Strait dynamic) for the past 30 years.

¶15. (C) Professor xxxx of the Central Party School's Institute for International Strategic Studies acknowledged that the editorial line of Global Times made it very popular among common people and leaders. "I read Global Times every day," he told PolOff February 3. In this respect, Global Times appears to sometimes outshine its parent organization, the flagship newspaper of the Communist Party, People's Daily. When asked February 3 about a nuanced, full-page analysis of U.S.-China relations published January 19 in People's Daily that called for restraint in addressing the "inevitable" bilateral frictions in the relationship that would come up in 2010, four of Beijing's top experts in U.S.-China affairs (including Professor xxxx and the ubiquitous commentator xxxx of Renmin University) confessed they were unaware of it.

Watch China's Actions, Not Words

¶16. (C) Global Times xxxx advised PolOff "not to be concerned" about the aggressive tone in China's interaction with the West, including in recent commentary about the U.S.-China relationship. The Chinese government had a clear vision of China's interests, xxxx said, and it was most important to maintain a "favorable foreign policy environment" for the government to pursue pressing economic and social development goals at home. A good relationship with the United States was essential, a view he had heard recently expressed by Chinese officials. China's statements criticizing the United States on the Google case, Internet freedom, Taiwan arms sales and the President's planned meeting with the Dalai Lama were all "necessary to satisfy the Chinese people," but China's actions in 2010 would be aimed at preserving China's relationships with the rest of the world. Quoting a Chinese phrase used to describe Deng Xiaoping's strategy for mollifying ideological Communists with socialist rhetoric while pursuing capitalist economic reforms, xxxx said we should expect China in its 2010 foreign policy to "put on the left turn signal in order to turn right."

HUNTSMAN